

Do peer Review Activities Contribute to the Development of Self-Correction Skills in EFL Writings?

journal or publication title	Hoshi journal of general education
number	30
page range	13-19
year	2012
URL	http://id.nii.ac.jp/1240/00000260/

Do Peer Review Activities Contribute to the Development of Self-Correction Skills in EFL Writings?

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1. Introduction

Peer review is one of the collaborative learning approaches to improve the quality of students' written texts. P. Elbow [1] originally introduced this approach in 1970's as part of the process approach to teaching the first language writing. Later, the method became widely recognized to be effective and second language teachers started to use the approach. The effectiveness of the peer review activities has been evaluated in the United States as well as some Asian countries [2]-[13]. The author and her fellow researchers have also conducted several researches concerning the peer review method [14]-[28]. Since providing feedback to other's writing involves problem-solving tasks, peer review activities are useful in the development of reading, writing and critical thinking abilities [15]. Mittan [9] suggested that peer review activities help students develop a sense of audience, increase motivation, and confidence in their own writing. This should also be quite useful for students to learn to evaluate and revise their own writing better.

In the present study, the author will examine whether a series of peer review activities bring about positive effects on students in self-correcting their own essays. The author evaluated the improvement of the students' writing by looking into the surface errors such spelling, grammatical, and syntax errors. The main contribution to the field of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) writing is that this study presents an educational impact on learners' achievement through peer review

activities.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The method of the experiment is presented in the next section. The third section shows the results and discussion, and the conclusion of this study is in the final section.

2. Method of the Experiment

The experiment was conducted to see whether or not a series of peer review activities contribute to the development of self-correction skills in foreign language writings. The author divided a class into two groups; one that took the first semester writing class and experienced peer review activities four times (Group A), and the other that did not take the course during the first semester and had no experience of the peer review (Group B).

2.1 Participants

The participants of this experiment were forty-three Japanese students who were enrolled in the six-year course at a pharmaceutical university in Tokyo. They were all fourth-year students and the number of male and female participants was seventeen and twenty-six respectively. Twenty-two students were in Group A, but three students (1 male and 2 females) were eliminated from the data analysis because they did not attend one of the four peer review activities. Twenty-one students were in Group B. All participants had been educated in Japan and received at least nine years of instruction in English. None of them had lived in any English speaking countries.

2.2 Procedures

On the day of the essay writing class, the instructor gave her students the following essay topic. “Please explain what ‘generic drugs’ are to a person who does not have any knowledge of generic drugs. The person wants to know the difference between ‘brand-name drugs’ and ‘generic drugs,’ the advantages and disadvantages of generic drugs, and your personal opinion.” To minimize the knowledge difference on the topic,

students were permitted to use the Internet for ten minutes to gather information in Japanese. Then, they were given fifty minutes to write a logical essay with approximately two hundred words. They were allowed to use dictionaries. The instructor gave a brief explanation in Japanese about the assignment to ensure that all students had a clear understanding of the instruction. After the completion of the first draft, all essays were collected and printed out for the next class.

One week later basic grammar test with thirty questions was given to the students for the purpose of comparing the students' grammar levels between Group A and Group B. The provided time for taking the test was twenty minutes. They were not allowed to any dictionaries.

Two weeks later the instructor returned the essay to each student and asked them to revise their own essay in class. They were told to critically read the essay and find any ambiguous sentences supposing that someone else had written it. The time limit for revising the essay was forty minutes, and they were permitted to dictionaries. All essays were collected at the end of the work. After that they were told to write about what they thought of the activity in either Japanese or English.

3. Results and discussion

In this experiment the author expected that a series of peer review activities would result in positive effects on students upon self-correcting their own essay assuming that the peer review activity would lead the essay writer to objectively read their own essay and improve it.

The average word count of the first draft of the English essays in Group A was 178 words, the shortest essay contained 136 words, and the longest essays contained 238 words. The average word count of the first draft of the English essays in Group B was 162 words, the shortest essay contained 124 words, and the longest essays contained 241 words. The average score of the grammar test results in Group A was 21.3 (71.0%), ranging from 14 to 29. The average score of the grammar test results in Group B was 20.8 (69.3%), ranging from 13 to 29. There was little difference in English grammar levels between Group A students and Group B students. Eight students in Group A drastically revised their essays. Twenty students

including the above-mentioned eight in Group A found grammatical errors or incoherence in his or her own essay and made necessary corrections. The remaining two students made few changes. Twelve students in Group B found surface errors such as grammatical errors and made necessary corrections. Although ten essays contained illogical statements, only two students in Group B took notice of the inconsistencies in their essays and revised their essays. Therefore, it can be said that many students in Group A had acquired the skill to objectively read their own essay and made necessary revisions. In other words, a series of peer review activities had positive effects on students' ability to self-correct and improve their own essay.

Fifteen out of eighteen participants (83.3%) in Group A answered "very useful," "quite useful," or "somewhat useful" to the question "Was the peer review trainings helpful in self-correcting your essay?" The results of the questionnaire after the whole experiment revealed that the experience of peer review activities was helpful in rereading and revising their own essay. One student stated that they were not sure if the activity was the reason why her English comprehension level improved because she continued studying English even during summer vacation. The remaining two students approached me after class and said, "I still feel I am poor at English and have no confidence in writing an essay in English," "So do I. I'm not so good at English." "So we are not sure that experiencing the peer review activities during the first semester was really helpful this time."

4. Conclusion

In this study the author evaluated whether a series of peer review activities bring about positive effects on students in self-correcting their own essay. It was revealed that peer review activities are quite effective in refining foreign language compositions if students were trained to objectively read essays. This study is significant in that it showed that the peer review could contribute to the development of students' ability to improve their own composition and provide insight into their own writing. However, there is still room for improvement in the process of

the activities. The author plans to make further analyses so as to establish more effective peer review approach.

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